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## **Frisby marks 100 years**



Cathryn Frisby reminisces with former students during a reunion back in 2014 / file photo.  
Cathryn Frisby has touched many lives in her almost 100 years on this planet.

The longtime Fairbury teacher and volunteer will celebrate the birthday milestone this Friday, May 14. Frisby is proud of being a farm wife and fondly looks back at her teaching career. She always enjoys running into former students.

“When you teach, the children become your family,” Frisby said during a 2014 reunion with her country school students.

Born and raised on a farm northwest of Fairbury, Frisby graduated as valedictorian from Fairbury Township High School in 1939. She later attended Illinois State Normal University studying education on a scholarship.

Frisby was 20 when she started teaching at the old Baker School and stayed there a couple of years before teaching at Isaac Walton School in Fairbury where she taught sixth grade for two years. Frisby then started a program for children with special needs

in Peoria public schools before coming back to the area when the local school board asked her to return to Fairbury to spearhead the consolidation of the old one-room school houses.

After staying home for several years to raise a family, Frisby taught at Westview Elementary, currently Prairie Central Elementary in Fairbury, until her retirement.

“I loved living on the farm and would still be there if I was physically able,” Frisby said. “My first tractor experience was an old McCormick-Deering.”

Frisby comes from a family of longevity as her paternal grandfather lived to 110 and her maternal grandmother lived to be a month shy of 105. In fact, both of her parents lived into their 90s.

At the age of 98, Frisby was honored at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield for her 90 years of dedication to the 4-H program and also spoke on behalf of her graduating class of 1939 at the local alumni banquet. She even saw Willie Nelson perform in concert when she was 97.

Frisby’s father was a strong believer in the phrase “history is being made” and she approached her life that way. He took the family to the World’s Fair in Chicago in the back of a grain truck lined with straw. They spent the night in an empty office building to see the event the very next day. Her mother’s favorite quote was “this too shall pass.” Frisby considered this a part of the life cycle and is a positive thinker to this day – whether it is regarding the COVID-19 pandemic or life in general.

At the age of 8, Frisby became one of the original members of a 4-H club which started north of Fairbury. Her 4-H membership evolved into Rural Youth and then to Country Couples for a total of 92 years to date. Frisby was a 4-H leader, judge at the county fair, volunteer at the 4-H food stand and an active contributor to the Home Extension Office.

“Cathryn was such a wonderful teacher,” recalled former Westview Elementary teacher Karen Harms. She was so kind and thoughtful to the students and staff and volunteered for many activities.”

Harms is impressed with Frisby’s memories of those teaching days.

“She could tell you about everything that went on at Westview – when they did different projects such as painting the hallway and doing floors.”

A former sixth grade student of Frisby’s and longtime friend Marie Stahl considered Frisby a “fantastic” teacher.

“She has always been so friendly and good humored,” Stahl noted.

Always an educator at heart, Frisby was often requested to provide programs to local groups over the years and could speak on a variety of topics, from quilting and corn to gravestones and school houses.

Charlene Aaron and her mother both had Frisby for a teacher. Aaron describes her as a special person who helped her better understand math while being patient and kind.

“She is such a social butterfly,” Aaron explained. “When she speaks, I am in awe of the depth of her knowledge of historical and current information.”

Arnold Ifft had Frisby for a teacher in the seventh grade at the old Avoca School north of Fairbury. He recalls playing a game of baseball out in the school yard while three of the players were bigger than the rest of the kids so they stayed up to bat and never got out. That all changed when Mrs. Frisby got up to pitch.

“She struck us out and said get out there to the field,” Ifft chuckled.

Ifft considers Frisby a super teacher.

Frisby was involved with the local DARE program and the UNITED Pilgrimage sponsorship, making pies for bake sales and selling tickets at pancake and sausage breakfasts. Her club memberships have included Fairbury Junior Woman’s Club, Garden Club, Fairbury Historical Society, Spence Farm Foundation, Dominy Library, Forrest Historical Society, McDowell Methodist Church, Sunbeams, Sunshine Club, Methodist Women, Quilters, LACC and Retired Teachers.

She also received the most recent Fairbury Citizen of the Year honor from the Fairbury Woman’s Club.

A mother to Pam, Suzy and Barb, Frisby actively supported their many different activities in various clubs and organizations. She had a leadership role in Girl Scouts, helping with campouts. Frisby’s husband, Bill, passed away in 2009. The couple married in March 1948.

All of Frisby’s friends and former students are encouraged to send a birthday card in honor of the May 14 occasion. Cards should be mailed to Cathryn Frisby at Evenglow Lodge, 215 East Washington Street in Pontiac 61764.

One of Frisby’s favorite quotes is, “Richer than me you never shall be for I had a mother who read to me.”

A rich life indeed.